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Approved For Release 2000/08/30 : CIA-RDP80T01719R000400080005-8

10 August 1972

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Modifications Which Might Enhance The Impact Of The  
U.S. Interdiction Program Against North Vietnam

The attached report surveys the U. S. bombing and mining program as outlined by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It presents an analysis of that program during the 1965-68 period and the current status of their transportation system and their economy. Implicit in this analysis, or indicated at certain points therein, are some suggestions for modifications in the current pattern of activity which might enhance the interdiction program's overall impact on North Vietnam. These various suggestions are pulled together below in a summary checklist.

A. Despite the greater degree of concentration of effort against certain targets now, compared to the 1965-68 period, far too many strikes are being expended against marginal "storage" areas and far too few against transportation targets.

B. The heavy emphasis on the Panhandle transportation network, about 70%, is inconsistent with the strategic purposes of the program. A far greater proportion of total strikes should be directed against the road and rail system in northern North Vietnam.

C. On purely operational grounds, a maximum weight of LOC interdiction effort should be targetted against what is now a 25 mile buffer-zone adjacent to the Chinese border in order to keep the road and rail transshipment areas on the North Vietnamese side of the border under frequent

TS No. 203097/72/a  
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attack. Obviously there are other considerations here involved, but the existence of a buffer-zone sanctuary does reduce the impact of the total interdiction effort.

D. The industrial targetting thus far appears optimum, and it is doubtful that the overall objectives of the program would be further served by more intensive (or extensive) bombing of these or additional economic targets.

E. The strikes targetted against the repair facilities -- with the exception of the few related to the repair of rolling stock -- will probably yield a fairly low return. It would be exceedingly costly to attempt to negate North Vietnam's capability to repair trucks and small watercraft by strategic bombing.

F. Strikes against the main petroleum depots have been largely successful, and attempts to destroy dispersed storage would be very unprofitable. It would be better in the future to concentrate bombing on a round-the-clock effort against the POL resupply channels, particularly the pipeline from the PRC. Such an effort would be difficult, but there would appear to be no other way to effectively prevent Hanoi from rebuilding its POL stocks.

G. Finally, the total number of sorties presently being flown are almost certainly too few in number for keeping the essential targets under sustained interdiction. Some improvement in the sortie/target ratio can undoubtedly be made by a greater concentration of the current effort, notably by fewer strikes in the Panhandle. However, the task of interdicting North Vietnam's transportation system is a mammoth one, and the current level of sorties is not sufficient for genuine interdiction as opposed to what might be called aggravating harassment.

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H. We understand that there are large stretches of seacoast north of Haiphong which have not been mined. Further some coastal craft in the area have been observed, possibly coming from China. This type of traffic, if not stopped, could develop into a very large loophole in the maritime import denial effort.

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